DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 377 CG 025 655

AUTHOR	Argyris, Pamela; And Others
TITLE	Improving Conflict Resolution Skills of Primary Students through Curriculum Adaptation and Teacher Interventions.
PUB DATE	Apr 94
NOTE	83p.; M.A. Thesis, Saint Xavier University.
PUB TYPE	Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Aggression; Antisocial Behavior; *Conflict Resolution; Cooperative Learning; Group Activities; Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; *Primary Education; *Problem Solving; Questionnaires; *Self Esteem; Social Cognition; Social Problems; Surveys; *Units of Study
IDENTIFIERS	Peace Education

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving social and conflict resolution skills of primary students in three middle class suburban schools located in a northwest suburb of Chicago, Illinois. This program was recognized by teaching staff who found students lacking in social skills, problem solving strategies and the ability to solve conflicts. Teacher observation and teacher/student surveys confirmed the problem. Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students demonstrate inappropriate (negative) skills for resolving their own conflicts, and that this lack of skill may come from socioeconomic background, exposure to violence, poor family relations, poor self-esteem and a lack of knowledge of alternative solutions. A combination of solution strategies suggested by research, teacher experience and collegial support resulted in the following interventions: (1) provide lessons on self-esteem; (2) utilize conflict resolution techniques through literature and role playing; and (3) adapt the life skills unit. The outcome of this Action Research Project was that students exhibited an increase in their ability to recognize and resolve conflict by utilizing appropriate resolution strategies. (Author)

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IMPROVING CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS OF PRIMARY STUDENTS THROUGH CURRICULUM ADAPTATION AND TEACHER INTERVENTIONS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University - IRI
Field Based Master's Program

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Action Research Final Report
Site: Wheeling, IL
Submitted: April, 1994

Certified Staff
Districts 21, 25 and
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Abstract

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DATE: April, 1994

TITLE: Improving Conflict Resolution Skills of Primary Students Through Curriculum Adaptation and Teacher Interventions

ABSTRACT: This report describes a program for improving social and conflict resolution skills of primary students in three middle class suburban schools located in a northwest suburb of Chicago, Illinois. This program was recognized by teaching staff who found students lacking in social skills, problem solving strategies and the ability to solve conflicts. Teacher observation and teacher/student surveys confirmed this problem.

Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students demonstrate inappropriate (negative) skills for resolving their own conflicts, and that this lack of skill may come from socioeconomic background, exposure to violence, poor family relations, poor self-esteem and a lack of knowledge of alternative solutions.

A combination of solution strategies suggested by research, teacher experience and collegial support resulted in the following interventions: provide lessons on self-esteem, utilize conflict resolution techniques through literature and role playing and adapt the life skills unit.

The outcome of this Action Research Project was that students exhibited an increase in their ability to recognize and resolve conflict by utilizing appropriate resolution strategies.

Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT

Problem Statement

A problem statement is defined as one in which an issue is identified and the context within which it exists is described. It generally is composed of three parts: the first identifies the target group, the second describes the condition of discrepancy, and the third lists or describes the tools by which the measurements are made. The problem statement to be addressed in this study is as follows: the primary students at three suburban elementary schools exhibit an inability to resolve conflicts due to a lack of social skills and problem solving strategies as measured by teacher observation, student surveys and collegial input.

Description of Immediate Problem Setting

This project will target three elementary schools in a district located in the northwest suburban area of Chicago. The specific classes involved include two second grade regular education classes and a primary special education diagnostic program. In addition, input from specialists in physical education and school health will be included.

The children involved all reside in middle to upper middle class neighborhoods and come from various cultural backgrounds. Approximately 75 percent of the students in the schools are Caucasian. Of the remaining 25

percent, about 12 percent are Hispanic, 10 percent are Asian and three to four percent are Black, although only two percent are from families with limited English proficiency. Additionally, seven percent are low income students whose families are receiving public aid (School District 21, 1990).

Each staff averages thirty-five teachers. Ninety-five percent of the staff are Caucasian females who have an average of fifteen years teaching experience. About half of them have a Master's Degree. Presently, the student to teacher ratio is 20.2:1. This ratio seems inaccurate since classrooms presently have about 25 children. But the ratio also includes staff who are not classroom teachers, such as the music, art and library-learning center teachers, as well as a special education resource teacher and a teacher of physical education.

The building principals have each been involved in the field of education for about twenty years and are described by staff in each building as approachable, empathetic, knowledgeable and innovative. Each principal has an assistant who is also a full time teacher. In the event of the principal's absence, this teacher leaves the classroom and functions as the building administrator. The affected class is then taught for the day by a substitute. A Building Council exists which is made up of teacher volunteers and the principal. The council's purpose is to provide consensus decision making in matters of school concern, from curriculum adaptations, to inservice opportunities, to community involvement in the educational process.

Each school also receives services from several auxiliary personnel which includes the school psychologist, the social worker, the school nurse, the speech and language pathologists and occupational and physical therapists. Some of these individuals are in the buildings full-time and others serve on an

itinerant basis, meaning that they are assigned to other buildings in addition and are present on a part-time basis.

The facilities were built in the late 60's and each provides an adequate educational environment despite classrooms that are generally considered small and a library learning center that was not designed for large numbers of computers to be in use at the same time. Because of the declining numbers of school age children in the adjacent neighborhood, one facility has extra classrooms available for use. These rooms are presently occupied by self contained special education programs which are administered by a cooperative agreement with neighboring districts. One of these classes, mentioned previously, is part of this study.

The demographics of these particular elementary buildings reflect those of the district as a whole except in the area of low income students. The district's average in this area is 10.4 percent versus an average seven percent at the participating schools. The district currently operates eleven schools: nine elementary buildings housing grades K-6, and two junior highs with grades seven and eight.

The central administrative structure is headed by a superintendent who is supported by a staff of assistant superintendents for curriculum and instruction, special education, personnel, business, and buildings-grounds and maintenance. Each of the assistant superintendents has a staff, some of whom are consultants or specialists in specific curricular or technological areas and others who provide support in areas like community relations.

On the whole, this school district has stabilized after experiencing a decade of declining enrollments which necessitated closing two of its elementary buildings. In recent years the school age populations appeared to

have stabilized enough so that the district feels confident in undertaking a remodeling-rebuilding program that is presently in progress in two of its schools.

Description of Surrounding Community

The community served by the schools has a population of about 75,500 people. The district serves all or part of four neighboring communities which mirror each other in their descriptions. Per capita income averages $22,864 with 2.4 percent of the residents listed as below poverty level. Households average 2.85 persons and residental housing values average $155,148. Apartments rent for an average of $550 per month. This is an upwardly mobile community with 29.4 percent of its residents having academic degrees. An additional 22.3 percent have had some education at the college level (Village of Arlington Heights, 1990). Although most families now have both parents employed outside the home, the schools have actively involved Parent Teacher Organizations. The staff considers the presence of an active PTO as a positive influence in each building. Parents are generally supportive of the school district and its programs and supply a visible volunteer force to aid with projects from fund raising to extra help in the classroom. Funds raised by the PTO are used to purchase supplemental materials for each classroom that that would not normally be supplied by the school district.

A description of the district and in particular the buildings that will be the subject of discussion could well fit most schools in the adjacent suburban area. The children are from the same diverse backgrounds as can be found in any neighborhood school within a fifteen mile radius of this locale. And it is for that reason that we believe the problem that will be addressed in this study is not

unique to this particular setting.

Regional and National Context of the Problem

Across the nation, conflict resolution has clearly emerged as a central emphasis to aid our students' transition into the 21st century. Using the strategies of conflict resolution combined with higher level thinking skills will be a necessity as our children mature and become more actively involved in a highly complicated and competitive world. Incorporating thinking skills with those conflict resolution strategies is more important today than ever before. There is strong evidence to support the idea that in order for conflict resolution to be successful, problem solving and thinking skills must be integrated into the curriculum (Fogarty and Bellanca, 1992).

Early research finds the acquisition of thinking skills as a major goal of specialists in all curricular areas. Math teachers Szetela and Nichol (1992), tell us that the task will not be an easy one. They are of the opinion that problem solving, and not just in the context of math, requires considerable thinking, and that even though students may possess thinking skills, they are not likely to communicate them. According to Shattles (1992), children can learn to solve conflicts by reading and writing stories about conflict. When children utilize such techniques as brainstorming, role playing and journal writing, they learn other conflict resolution concepts, cooperation, affirmation and communication.

A study done in 1986 by Worsham and Stockton (cited in Worsham, 1988) indicates that thinking skills can be improved through direct instruction. This study is supported by Willis (1993), a specialist in supervision and instruction. He believes that direct instruction allows students to utilize the thinking strategies they already know, enabling them to gain control over their own learning, and to transfer and apply those skills to different situations both in

the classroom, and more importantly in our "high tech" world.

In order to be successful in this "high tech" world, we must challenge students to move beyond the ability to recall and comprehend information and to incorporate the more complex thinking skills of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Skills that use evidence in reasoning about cause and effect are also crucially important in our everyday lives (Swartz, 1986). If teachers become more actively articulate and model good problem solving strategies in their classrooms, students may become more effective problem solvers.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Background

Conflict resolution is defined as the ability to appropriately and cooperatively resolve differences through peaceful means. Often referred to as peace education, conflict resolution skills are those which actualize children's potentialities in helping them to learn how to make peace with themselves and with others, and to live in harmony and unity with self, mankind and with nature. Authors McGinnis and McGinnis agree. They state that peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather that conflict is an inevitable fact of daily life-internal, interpersonal, intergroup and international conflict. Peace consists in creatively dealing with conflict. Peace is the process of working to resolve conflicts in such a way that both sides win, with increased harmony as the outcome of the conflict and its resolution (Hudson, 1991). The resolution is peaceful if the participants want to cooperate more fully and find themselves enabled to do so.

Despite recent legislation passed in September, 1993 in the State of Illinois requiring school districts to teach children non-violent methods of resolving conflicts, very few local schools have developed and implemented extensive curriculums to address this issue. The idea is a wonderful one, but the legislation is weak because it is unfunded. This means that school districts are required to comply only if they are able to obtain federal funds or to

generate contributions from private sources.

Although a concern exists nationwide for educators to produce students with higher academic scores, the goal of students with improved social skills appeared until recently to be unfortunately, not a major concern. But concern is growing and as reported in *Teacher Today* (1993), a number of school district across the nation have implemented programs which have resulted in lowered stress levels, more caring behavior on the part of the students, increased sense of safety, less time being spent on discipline, and a more positive school climate.

However, those teachers who have found a need to improve the social skills of their students have been forced to design curriculums dealing with issues that until recently had hardly ever been mentioned in the classroom: physical/emotional abuse, violence, neglect, homelessness, substance dependence, to name a few. Gesten and Weissberg (1986) agree that like it or not, teachers have been forced to take on a variety of socialization roles reserved primarily for parents in prior generations.

Problem Evidence

Both subjective and objective means were used to document the evidence of poor social skills and problem solving strategies, both of which affect a child's ability to resolve conflicts. A letter to colleagues (Appendix A) and a questionnaire regarding teacher perceptions of children's social skills was distributed to teachers at the three elementary schools. (Appendix B)

Analysis of surveys completed by the eighty-four teachers who responded to the survey indicated a need for interventions in the area of conflict resolution. Responses of 'always,' 'often' or 'sometimes' were tabulated to

reveal that at least ninety-one per cent of responding teachers felt that the children in their classrooms exhibited low self-esteem. Responses of 'seldom' or never' were interpreted to mean that teachers saw very little evidence of concern in their classrooms. At least seventy per cent of these same respondents indicated that children also were involved in incidents of physical or verbal abuse towards their peers. Additionally, at least sixty-two per cent of teachers felt that their students showed a lack of respect either for other children, adults or the property of others. On a positive note, ninety-seven per cent of the respondents felt that parents were supportive of their classroom management techniques, However, several noted that the parent support most often came from those individuals whose children were not considered to be problematic in the classroom. This data summary is presented in Figure I.

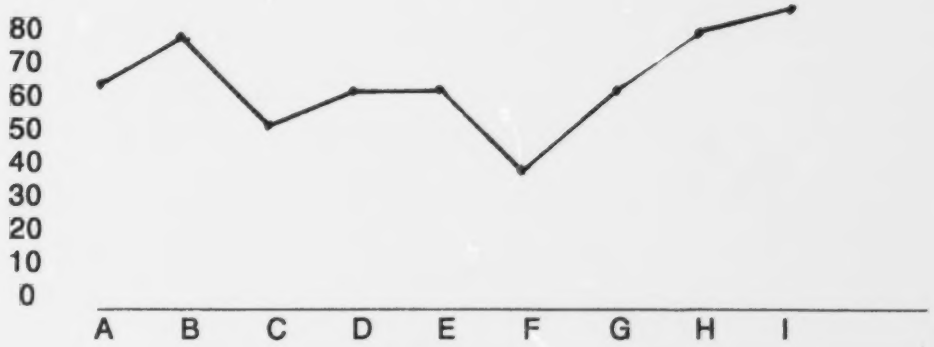

Figure I

Teacher Survey Results Indicating a Need for Interventions
in the Areas of Student Self-Esteem and Conflict Resolution

A = Per cent of responses indicating low self-esteem
B = Per cent of responses indicating inability to work in groups
C = Per cent of responses indicating instances of verbal aggression
D = Per cent of responses indicating incidents of physical aggression
Per cent of responses indicating a lack of respect for:
E = children F = adults G = property of others
H = Per cent of responses indicating impulsivity
I = Per cent of responses indicating parental support

Table 1

Number of Teacher Responses in Each
Category on Teacher Survey
October, 1993

Question	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Do you have students who do not have a respect for themselves?	2	24	42	12	4
2. Do you have students who have difficulty working in groups?	8	24	40	10	0
3. Do you have students who are verbally abusive to others?	6	26	20	26	2
4. Do you have students who are physically aggressive towards others?	2	26	28	26	2
5. Do you have students who show lack of respect for: other children	6	18	32	22	4
6. adults	6	14	26	28	10
7. property of others	6	14	34	22	4
8. Do you think students do not think before they act?	8	36	36	4	0
9. Do you believe parents are supportive of your classroom management?	18	48	16	0	2

N = 84

Table 1 presents a more detailed summary of the data in Figure 1. It

illustrates the total number of responses to the specific questions on the teacher survey shown in Appendix B. The questions on the survey were designated to elicit teacher responses that would be relevant for the purpose of this project, which was to determine the need for interventions in the areas of concern. Question number one dealt with self-esteem, questions two through eight dealt with teacher perception of student social skills and question nine dealt with parent participation.

One of the considerations in deciding that there was a need for interventions in the area of self esteem was determined by the responses to the first question on the survey. The teacher response "sometimes" indicated that students could benefit from additional lessons on self-esteem. The responses to questions concerning students' social skills showed a definite need for interventions in the area of positive peer relations, group cooperation, verbal and physical aggression and respect for children, adults and property of others.

There appears to be a contradiction between the responses to the questions concerning social skills and the responses to the question "Do children think before they act?" Apparent positive responses could indicate that the latter question was not specific enough in relation to the other questions on the survey.

Further confirmation of the need to improve students' self esteem, social skills and conflict resolution skills was documented after interviewing school social workers who on the whole agreed with the findings of the teacher survey. One responding Licensed Clinical Social Worker said, "Kids lack experiences and resources to solve their own problems." He stated that the children he serves need help with working on more positive self-help and self-esteem skills. Children need to be taught a frame of criteria, language and inter-

ventions. In addition, social work colleagues, both also L.C.S.W.'s, commented that verbal and physical aggression is exhibited in over seventy -five per cent of the students they serve, all of whom are in special education programs for the behavior disordered. A more passive, self-destructive response system is prevalent with children in learning disabled, physically handicapped or mild mentally impaired populations. They also reported a major decrease in physical and verbal aggressive incidents as compared to children in the mainstream. In summary, all the social workers consulted were in agreement that most children are in need of a program which will aid them in dealing with conflicts.

A student questionnaire (Appendix C) was administered to fifty-three second grade age students. Figure 2 illustrates the results of this pre-intervention survey.

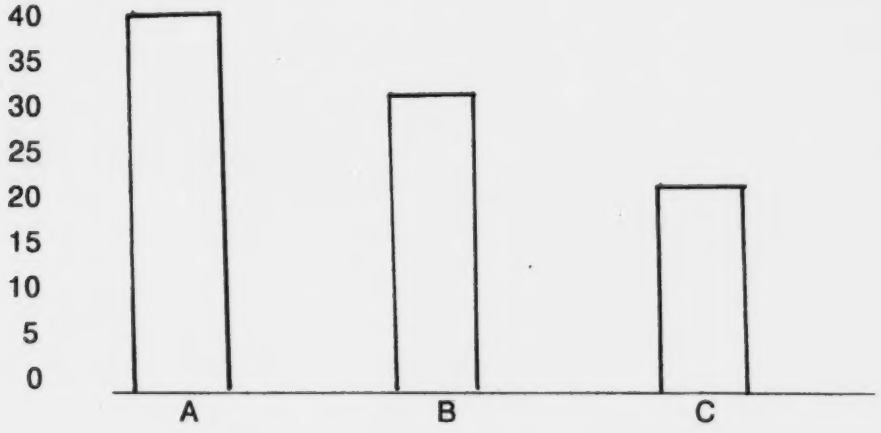

Figure 2

Student Survey Results Indicating Perceptions of Self-Esteem
Social Skills and Conflict Resolution Skills

A = Average number of responses indicating positive self-esteem
B = Average number of responses indicating appropriate social skills
C = Average number of responses indicating positive conflict resolution skills

Figure 2 shows an average of the total number of responses to the specific questions on the survey shown in Appendix C. While this graph indicates that the majority of the students surveyed seemed to possess positive self esteem as well as knowledge of appropriate social skills, it also shows that a need for conflict resolution skills exists.

Table 2 depicts the individual responses to the student survey questions shown in Appendix C. Students were directed to respond with an answer of 'always', 'sometimes' or 'never' when answering each question. Questions one through four dealt with issues of self-esteem, numbers five and six dealt with social skills and questions seven and eight dealt with conflict resolution.

Table 2

Student Pre-Intervention Survey Results
October, 1993

Question	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. Do you like yourself?	34	17	2
2. Do you have a friend?	43	9	1
3. Do you know how to be a friend?	43	10	0
4. Do you believe that you are loved?	41	11	1
5. Do you get along with your classmates?	27	23	3
6. Do you like working in co-operative groups?	36	16	1
7. Do you sometimes have to fight to settle differences?	5	14	34
8. Do you think you behave the same at school as home?	22	23	8

N = 53

As expected, the results of the student survey differed from that of the teachers. Students felt that they had little or no difficulties in the areas of concern. This can be attributed to the students' general lack of ability to recognize conflict or to realize that their social skills need improvement. They cannot be expected to recognize these
situations when many have not yet been taught about appropriate behavior in school.

In addition, teacher observations through the use of anecdotal logs and conflict incident tallies (Appendix D), were also used to gather baseline data. Overall, these logs and tallies confirmed the need for interventions within the school environment to facilitate, develop and enrich children's social skills. Figure 3 on the following page illustrates a comparison of conflict incidents as recorded over a week long period in two second grade classrooms, a special education class of second grade age students, and a second grade physical education class.

For the purposes of this tally, physical aggression was documented at any time children had inappropriate physical contact with their peers. This ranged from such seemingly benign incidents as removing a pencil forcefully from another's hand to outward acts of aggression. Verbal aggression was documented when students engaged in name calling, inappropriate responses to others (more commonly called "put-downs") or the use of profane or disrespectful language. Teachers also tallied instances when children were uncooperative regarding directions given to them in the classroom.

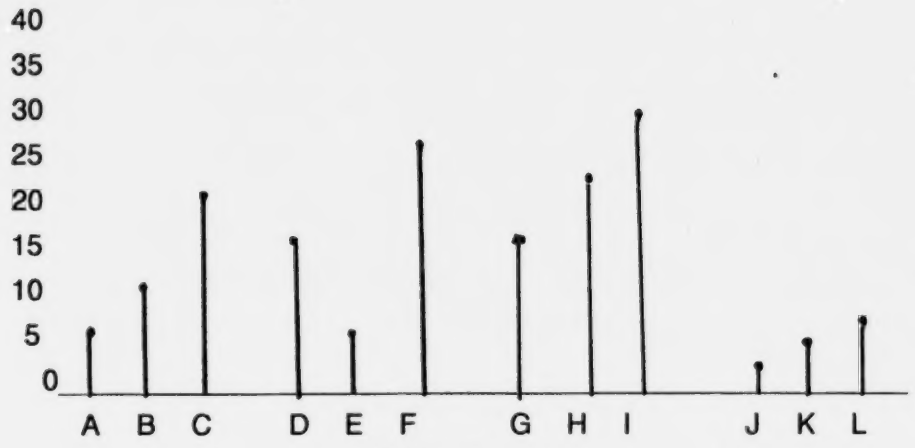

Figure 3

Summary of Conflict Incident Tallies in Targeted Classrooms for One Week Period

Classroom 1 number of incidents:
- A = verbal aggression
- B = physical aggression
- C = non-cooperation

Classroom 2 number of incidents:
- D = verbal aggression
- E = physical aggression
- F = non-cooperation

Special Ed. class number of incidents:
- G = verbal aggression
- H = physical aggression
- I = non-cooperation

Phys. Ed. class number of incidents:
- J = verbal aggression
- K = physical aggression
- L = non-cooperation

It should be noted that the primary cross-categorical, undiagnosed special education class included in this action research project works continuously on individual behavioral modification systems. The number of incidents in any given category for this class demonstrates a disproportionate finding because of the fewer number of students in the room. There are approximately two-thirds fewer students enrolled in the special education class, than in the regular education classrooms, yet the number of incidents recorded were similar in number. It should also be noted that the physical education

class met only twice during the time period that was allotted for gathering this data. The observation was conducted during two one-half hour class periods. Therefore, the number of incidents recorded appears to be fewer.

It can be concluded from the results of this conflict tally that as expected, interventions are necessary in order for children to learn appropriate behavior or responses when confronted with physical or verbal aggression. Additionally, this tally also indicated a need for interventions in the area of social skills and cooperative learning.

Probable Causes of Problem

Recent studies dealing with the need for improving children's conflict resolution skills often ask how schools can encourage social responsibility in their students (Schaps & Solomon, 1992). But many authors also agree that conflict is not always inherently bad, because it can sometimes produce positive outcomes if interventions have led children to acquire healthy approaches to dealing with the disagreements they encounter. Canadian teachers Adamson and Buchowski-Monnin (1990) state that conflict can be an important part of learning how to live together, and can lead to growth, especially when dealt with constructively. Further agreement found in Teacher *Today* (1993), relates that handled constructively, conflict can: instill an appreciation for diversity; broaden an understanding of the issues at hand; teach valuable skills including active listening, brainstorming, critical thinking, problem solving, negotiating, communicating, mediating, and decision making; increase understanding of oneself and others; stimulate healthy interaction; and create opportunities for building relationships.

Listed most frequently as the major reasons why children today are unable to effectively deal with conflict in their daily lives are influences such as: the present economy, continued exposure to violence, both personal and through the media, deteriorating family relationships, poorly developed self-image, and a general deficiency in children's' ability to determine peaceful solutions to their differences due to a lack of social skills. Additionally, teachers' attitudes in terms of their own personal bias', values and self-esteem have a tremendous impact on the children they teach.

Children of the 90's feel the effects of the income levels of their parents (Gesten, 1986). In fact, the United States has a higher rate of children living in poverty than any fully developed industrial nation on earth (Moseley, 1993). The need for two incomes to support a family whether it be affluent or impoverished has resulted in mothers re-entering the job force. Additionally, children from single parent homes can also find themselves left unsupervised or in substandard day care situations both before and after school. Parents no longer seem to have time to parent their children effectively. Researchers Pilisuk and Parks (cited in Hudson, 1991) view the breakdown of the family in Western society where the old, the disabled, the young and the unemployed are looked upon as problems rather than as people, as still another effect of today's economy on our children.

These same children are emulating negative role models relative to respecting others. They are exposed to violence in the home by being victims of child abuse and neglect as well as being witness to spouses beating each other. They see the effects of alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and high divorce rates. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand that children are confused about their role in the family.

Racism has affected families throughout the world and continues to be a major barrier to peace. Prejudice exists among peoples of all races and religious beliefs, often stemming from ideas learned at home. Conflict arises over "values and assumptions that are based on cultural/ethnic practices and racial or gender stereotypes" (Jandt, 1985 p. 3).

As if the home situations do not provide enough of a coping challenge, children growing up today are exposed to violence even in their leisure time activities. There is an overwhelming degree of violence on television, in the movies, in the popular video games that children play as well as in the comic books that are available to them. Children aged three through six spend an average of four hours a day watching television. By age eighteen, they will have spent the equivalent of seven years watching (more time than spent in school) and will have seen over 26,000 killings (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Hudson (1991, p. 16) agrees that "Findings of individual studies on violence in the media and anti-social behavior reveal a positive association between exposure to media violence and aggressiveness."

The deregulation of children's television has allowed shows such as The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to heighten the likelihood of aggressive behavior while diminishing that of pro-social behavior. This deregulation has allowed toy manufacturers to develop and market toys which encourage children to use violence in their play. And the abundance of violence seen on television has also rapidly increased the sale of war toys.

When children are not watching violence on television, these products encourage them to imitate it with their toys (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Hudson (1991) tells that the now classic studies of Bronfenbrenner (1970) found that if children see a fictionalized version of some event on television,

there is a strong tendency, even without reinforcement, for the children to repeat the action in a later situation.

Children receive mixed messages from media violence. A television character can be shot, and then continue his exploits in the following episode. In real life situations, this is, of course, impossible. Yet, children are expected to ignore the violent messages they receive from the media. What they need instead are opportunities to experience conflicts and to obtain ideas and skills about positive ways to resolve them!

In addition to the fictionalized violence children witness on television, they are exposed to real acts of violence by the media on a daily basis. From gangland shootings in the metropolitan areas in which they live, to reports of tourists or super-star athlete's parents being murdered, to world wide conflicts in far away places like Somalia or Bosnia or Belfast, reports of violence are as much a part of their daily lives as are eating and sleeping. Is it any wonder that children can become destructive and aggressive because of what they see and hear? Fassler and Janis (1985) report that children may focus on similar fears: war, loss of parent/parental figure, violence, crime, terrorist activity and even hijacking and cult practices. Children are more aware today that destructive forces can come from within as well as outside, but these authors also suggest that educators should prepare students to make better choices by balancing the factors in children's exposure to scenes of violence and threats of war.

According to school counselors, Mehaffey and Sandburg (1992), professionals in this area often see children referred for services because they lack the skills to connect successfully with their peers. They often exhibit an inability to play with others on the playground, work in co-operative groups in the classroom, and gain attention in positive ways. Kain, Downs and Black

(1988) refer to these skills as the life tools needed to successfully survive in society, whether it be to keep a job, or simply to keep friends. Children must possess the skills necessary to interact successfully with other people. The skills of social behavior are acquired ones; they must be taught, learned and mastered.

Teacher surveys explained earlier indicate a perception by teachers that children lack positive self images. The children themselves also indicated by their occasional negative responses to being loved and to having friends that at times they perceive their self worth as lacking. Since some students were unaware of the qualities necessary to be a friend, lessons in these areas are clearly indicated.

Teachers have a golden opportunity to help students troubled by low self esteem. The best place for them to start is by looking in the mirror! Adults bring a great deal of their own childhood experiences to conflict situations. According to Carter (1992, p. 146), "The questionable behaviors we see in teachers are the result of unexamined values, family of origin patterns and cultural contexts." Adults often repeat with their students the means by which their own families dealt with disagreements, and often these methods are not successful or appropriate.

Teachers lives as well are full of power struggles and experiences of powerlessness. Their lives are as much affected by real violence both on the streets, in the schools and in their homes as are the children's. Teachers need to recognize the "baggage" they bring to emotional conflicts and situations. This will allow them to become more effective in the environments they create to foster positive conflict resolution skills in their students. Canfield (1990, p. 48) says that in order to "raise the self-esteem of students, you must start with the

school staff." An anonymous author quoted in an article by Husar (1992) agrees. This poet says,

> No printed word or spoken plea
> Can teach young minds what they can be;
> Not all the books on all the shelves,
> But what the teachers are themselves.

Educators need to be more effective in helping students negotiate conflict resolution skills by seeing things from the child's point of view. This necessitates sensitivity and knowledge of child development. As authors and noted authorities Edwards and Ramsey (1986. p. 166) suggest, "Teachers should not impose adult standards of morality on the children. "

Fasler and Janis (1985) agree that this task is a challenge. It is teachers who are charged with the responsibility to become informed and to take proactive rather than reactive measures as citizens and professionals to turn the tide of violence toward peacefulness and peace.

So, therefore it becomes evident that these following causes are the major reasons for children's inability to deal with conflicts in an appropriate manner:

1. the present state of the economy,
2. continued exposure to violence, both personally and through the media,
3. deteriorating family relationships,
4. poorly developed self image,
5. a general inability to determine peaceful solutions to differences due to a lack of social skills,
6. teachers' attitudes in terms of their own personal bias', attitudes and self esteem.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

The research findings on the effects of conflict on children provide more than enough evidence to suggest that it is time for society to address this issue. Conflict which has been correlated with child behavior disorders include marital conflict, child/parental abuse, divorce and separation and step-parenting. Feelings of anger are common emotions today. Children vary in the amount and intensity of anger, frustration and aggression experienced, but all need help in identifying, labeling and expressing their feelings in socially acceptable ways (Butterworth & Fulmer, 1990).

Teachers cannot undo the effects of fear, chaos and poverty on students. They can provide children with tools to empower them so that they feel comfortable resolving conflicts in peaceful ways. As cited in Edwards and Ramsay (1986, p. 166), Katz (1984) states that:

> Teacher's goals in handling conflicts should not be simply to end them as quickly as possible. Conflicts are both inevitable and a valuable part of children's experiences. Children need practice in solving conflicts in order to develop concrete knowledge of what fairness means to them.

Children who do not know how to make peace with themselves and with others present a very perplexing problem. Often unable to understand the reasons why they feel the way they do, children instead choose to strike out at

others. Author Davis-Pack (1989 p. 41) attempts to explain this phenomenon when she states that "conflict makes people tend to distance themselves, but even more so their opponents, from moral values, thus justifying reprehensible behavior toward opponents and promoting violent, destructive outcomes." Thus, children do not often think through a situation thoroughly before they act. They do not view the opponent as a person.

Analysis of probable cause data suggests that "perhaps the most important lesson for students today is the knowledge and skill of how to get along and work with others" (Bredehoft, 1991 p. 122). Child development authorities contend that conflict and its successful resolution is an important aspect of social and emotional growth. Most agree that for social development to occur, conflict needs to be present in social situations so that the cognitive and social nature of conflict can be observed and recognized. Teachers cannot undo the effects of fear, chaos and poverty on students. They can provide children with tools to empower them so that they feel comfortable resolving conflicts in peaceful ways.

As discussed in Chapter 2, children's socioeconomic status has a major impact on their feelings of self-esteem. Although the schools are powerless to alter less desirable home environments, educators must work to establish an environment that builds self-worth and empowers the student by creating a warm atmosphere, offering respectful treatment, clearly defining limits, and emphasizing an "I can" attitude.

If teachers are to improve student's self-esteem, they must first understand what self esteem is. Butterworth and Fulmer (1990, p. 18) explain that :

> Self-esteem is one dimension of self-concept and refers specifically to our judgments about our own worth. Self-concept on the other hand, refers to other aspects as well, such as physical characteristics, gender and ethnicity. Self-esteem in young children develops partly from their being able to perceive themselves as competent persons. Feelings of competence result from successful interactions with and mastery of the environment.

The final goal in any classroom is for students to be able to work well together and to ultimately learn in the process. Teachers cannot ignore the importance of improving the self-awareness and self-esteem of the individual child, who can then transfer feelings of positive self-worth to others within the classroom. Briggs, as cited in Hudson (l99l), agrees that the key to self-worth is the development of high self-steem, because it is the basis for successful involvement with others.

The literature suggests some possible strategies for the students to use in an effort to improve their self-esteem. Listed among these techniques are the implementation of problem solving meetings. These meetings can be an effective way to discuss conflicts in an atmosphere where the students feel good about themselves (Vogel, l974). Various kinds of classroom meetings encourage change and teach techniques for coping with change and the possible conflicts that arise as a result of change. Branco (l99l) developed the idea of concern circles (a type of classroom meeting) to meet the overwhelming demand for a good listener to children's troubles. Through the use of concern circles, children become calmer and better able to concentrate, therefore they will be more ready to learn. These meetings should also encourage the development of insights to help students better understand one another, and take a more active role in resolving their own conflicts. With understanding comes greater acceptance and compassion.

Ideally, teachers and parents should work in conjunction to establish and maintain a cooperative approach to improved relationships with others. This in turn would foster an improved level of social skills in children. If adults act as appropriate role models, then empathy can be taught. Parents must have a key role when instituting and reinforcing such a program. Bredehoff (1991, p. 122) supports this idea by stating that "perhaps the most important lesson for students in any discipline today is the knowledge and skill of how to get along and work with others."

Additionally, a general lack of appropriate social skills has been listed as one of the reasons why students experience difficulty resolving their conflicts. Counselors Mehaffey and Sandberg (1992) report that children often lack the skills to connect successfully with their peers. This is evidenced by their inability to get along on the playground, to work in classroom groups and to generally gain attention in positive ways. But if teachers can develop programs to teach children these needed social skills, then more positive peer relationships and a greater degree of social acceptance can be a positive outcome. The most positive outcome however, would be that students who are more socially competent will often have a more positive academic experience as well as being better adjusted emotionally.

Growing up in a highly competitive society, children experience few opportunities to participate in successful cooperative ventures. As part of the solution, social skills should be taught and practiced in a cooperative group setting. Schools need to include social responsibility in their students, and the basic skills that constitute "socially responsible" behavior. Social responsibility is more than a set of learned skills. Children often focus on one aspect of a situation at a time, not seeing the relationships of the parts of a conflict to the

whole. It is often hard for them to think about the beginning (conflict), middle (negotiation), and end (solution) in any logically interconnected way (Carlsson-Paige and Levin, 1992).

If students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals, then these students will seek outcomes that are beneficial to all those with whom they are cooperatively linked. To reach this end, students must learn how to collaborate and get along with each other. (Hudson, 1991).

Johnson and Johnson's (1988) research shows that students can broaden their perspective, learn materials more thoroughly, and make better decisions through the use of cooperative learning. Students must value and respect each other and feel safe enough to challenge each other's ideas. They need to recognize similarities and differences. Feelings as well as information must be communicated and responded to appropriately.

Group problem solving should be executed within the predetermined climate of support, trust and confidence, and the win-win concept (Araki, 1983). Educators have seen children benefit and become enthusiastic through the use of win-win solutions as opposed to win-lose solutions. The benefits of cooperative learning are higher quality decisions and solutions, the promotion of creative insights and an increase of ideas and problem solving techniques.

One of the tools for teaching successful conflict resolution is the implementation of a peer mediation program. This program allows students to develop skills for dealing with in-school conflicts. The major difference in this program as opposed to those which deal with adult conflict resolution, is that this one allows children to respond to conflicts immediately, rather than at some future date. The rationale for this program, according to Davis (cited in Stichter

1986) is that "kids do it better." Children can solve their conflicts and deal with the situation in a shorter amount of time than adults can. Children need to be educated as to how the system works, rather than by just putting them into the dispute resolution process. Curricular adaptations have been made to provide all children an opportunity to discuss different ways of dealing with conflict. The benefit of this type of program is that it is an on-going process. In addition to finding solutions to current problems, students can continue to use the mediation skills they have learned throughout their lives.

"Literature has long been accepted as a way to help children confront problems and cope in this complex world" (Dow and Slaughter, 1989 p. 25). Books are useful in helping children to solve their problems because their effects are intuitive and immediate. Due to the anxiety-provoking nature of material concerning war and violence, it seems wise to focus renewed attention on children's books that are concerned with peace and peaceful solutions to difficult problems (Fassler and Janis, 1989). In view of this, peace related topics should become an important component in the education of children. The use of books focuses on self-awareness, awareness of others, conflict resolution, love of nature, global awareness, and imagination. Books are part of the early socialization process, and as such offer visual and verbal materials that children use as a developmental tool.

Some of the strategies for using literature effectively include: the conflict web, literature circles, role playing, creative dramatics, discussions, and illustrations of problems and solutions. "Sharing solutions to problems, fosters awareness of one's own and others' feelings" (Shattles, 1992 p.1).

Project Outcomes

Analysis of the probable cause data discussed previously suggests the need for implementation of a conflict resolution curriculum to provide opportunities for students to enhance their self-esteem.

Therefore:

> As a result of implementing conflict resolution strategies during the period beginning November, 1993 and extending through February, 1994, the primary students at three middle class elementary schools will increase their ability to resolve conflicts appropriately, as evidenced by teacher observation and student survey.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following process objectives define the major strategic procedures proposed for problem resolution.

1. As a result of implementation of a life-skills unit, occurring from November,1993 and extending through February, 1994, primary students will improve positive self-concept and decision making skills.

2. As a result of curriculum revision and adaptations, primary students will improve social skills through the use of children's literature at a minimum of two times per week.

3. As a result of curriculum development and implementation, primary students will improve conflict resolution skills, and cooperative grouping will be implemented as an ongoing strategy.

Proposal Solution Components

The major elements of the approach used to resolve conflict fell into three major concepts: self-esteem (respect for, or a favorable impression of, oneself), social skills (communication and friendship skills--getting along with others) and conflict resolution skills (the ability to resolve differences without physical or verbal aggression). Integration between and among the major concepts is

considered desirable and will provide the classroom teacher with a more flexible program. The solutions suggested are justified because they address the problem directly. Combined with teaching children social skills, and how to build self-esteem, these interventions allow children to develop skills to resolve conflict with others both at school and in the global community.

Chapter 4

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Description of Problem Resolution Activities

This action plan was designed to address three major solution components: self-esteem, social skills and conflict resolution skills. It has a series of lessons and suggested activities that can be used by teachers to help students gain confidence, use appropriate social behavior and learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully. These lessons will be implemented twice weekly for a minimum of thirty minutes each.

Many of these lessons will rely on bibliotherapy, the use of books in a therapeutic sense to promote mental health (Butterworth & Fulmer, 1990). These books will help the students to think positively and constructively, encourage them to talk freely about problems, help them analyze attitudes and behaviors, point out the possibility of multiple solutions to a problem and stimulate them to find appropriate solutions.

The implementation plan is presented in outline form and in chronological order, allowing for the overlapping of strategies. This is a general outline of the proposed lesson plans. The lessons will be adjusted and adapted according to class and time constraints.

Parents were contacted through letter (Appendix E) before implementation of this action plan. In order to facilitate partnering of home and

school environment, and therefore to maximize the desired outcomes of the project, this explanatory letter was distributed to children in the affected classes. Feedback from parents was extremely favorable.

Lesson Plan Outline

The self-esteem phase of this action research project will begin in November, 1993.

I. Self-esteem

A. Identify characteristics of self

Objective: The students will recognize that they are unique, special and continually growing and changing.

Lesson # 1 — 1. "Most Special Thing in the World"

Lesson # 2 — 2. "All About Me"

Lesson # 3 — 3. "Marvelous Me" posters

Lesson # 4 — 4. "Me Bags"

Lesson # 5 — 5. "I Have Feelings"

Lesson # 6 — 6. "I Feel Just Right"

B. Celebrating differences

Objective: The students will understand that people have the same basic needs and feelings regardless of looks or beliefs.

Lesson # 7 — 1. "Different Feelings"

Lesson # 8 — 2. "Grouch Day"

Lesson # 9 — 3. "What Bugs Me"

Lesson #10 — 4. "Celebrating Differences"

C. Friendship/Values and Respect

Objective: The students will explore the many facets of friendship and will explore feelings of self respect and respect for others.

Lesson #11 1. "Friendship"

Lesson #12 2. "Friendship and Conflict"

Lesson #13 3. "Values and Respect"

The social skills phase of this plan will begin in December, 1993.

II. Social Skills

Cooperation

Objective: The students will use cooperative learning to stress interdependence and respect for others.

Lesson #14 1. "Rules for Fighting Fair"

Lesson #15 2. "What Would You Do?"

The conflict resolution phase will begin in January, 1994 and culminate in February, 1994.

III. Conflict Resolution

A. Recognition of Conflict

Objective: The students will identify conflict and realize that it is a normal occurrence in relationships.

Lesson #16 1. "What Is Conflict Resolution?"

Lesson #17 2. "Conflict Resolution"

B. Solutions for Conflict

Objective: The students will learn strategies for solving conflicts peacefully.

Lesson #18 1. "I Message"

Lesson #19 2. "What Is a Peacemaker?"

Extended Activities: Use the list of children's literature found in Appendix F. These books can be used to stimulate discussion, to encourage role play or to teach individual concepts.

Methods of Assessment

A variety of data collection methods will be used in order to assess the effects of these interventions. The action plan will be evaluated in February, 1994.

The methods of assessment will be ongoing and authentic in nature. They will include teacher observation, paper and pencil activities (including journal responses), a student post-intervention survey and a post-intervention conflict resolution tally to be completed by the classroom teachers.

Chapter 5

EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND PROCESSES

Implementation History

The terminal objective of the interventions addressed the inability of primary students to resolve conflicts appropriately. Student and teacher surveys and teacher comments and observations indicated a need for interventions in the areas of conflict resolution, self-esteem and social skills. The terminal objective of this action research project stated:

> As a result of implementing conflict resolution strategies during the period beginning November, 1993 and extending through February, 1994, the primary students at three middle class elementary schools will increase their ability to resolve conflicts appropriately, as evidenced by teacher observation and student survey.

The following process objectives defined the major strategic procedures which were utilized:

1. As a result of implementation of a life-skills unit, occurring from November,1993 and extending through February, 1994, primary students will improve positive self-concept and decision making skills.

2. As a result of curriculum revision and adaptations, primary students will improve social skills through the use of children's literature at a minimum of two times per week.

3. As a result of curriculum development and implementation, primary students will improve conflict resolution skills, and cooperative grouping will be implemented as an ongoing strategy.

This project was designed and carried out in two second grade classrooms and a non-categorical special education class of second grade age students. The physical education teacher involved in this project participated in team teaching lessons in one of the targeted second grade classrooms. Additionally, lessons were reinforced whenever that class of children met for physical education instruction. The certified school nurse project member was teamed with the special education teacher. Together, they presented lessons relating to this project to the eight students using a modified curriculum at a pre-readiness level.

Teacher/researchers met to review the life skills curriculum currently in use in the participating classrooms. It was decided that modifying and adapting this existing curriculum would not be sufficient to address teacher concerns. Therefore, the need for outside resources was apparent. Lessons were designed to meet the goals and objectives of this project and served as an impetus for on-going curriculum development.

This project had three major components: one for self-esteem, one for social skills and one for conflict resolution. These components were taught in a sixteen week time frame. All participating teachers devoted thirty minutes twice a week for the targeted instruction. Given other grade level curriculum concerns, this time was the maximum that could be allotted for direct instruction devoted to this project. It was becoming apparent after the first few weeks that this restricted time element was insufficient to accomplish the goals to the degree the writers had intended. Modifications in the original plan would be necessary, especially in the case of the special education students. These modifications would be necessary both in planned curriculum and in time allotment.

Teacher input through the use of a survey (Appendix B) was sought. Results established and validated the need for such a project. The process began with a recognition of the need for positive self awareness through a student pre-project survey. After analyzing the collective data, it was decided what plan of action would be followed. Thirteen specific lessons were designed and dedicated to the self-esteem portion of this project. A systematic approach to data collection was clearly defined. All data collection would be accomplished in the three separate arenas of self-esteem, social skills and conflict resolution skills.

The remaining lessons were devoted to the teaching of social and conflict resolution skills. For outline purposes, these lessons were subdivided, but all were designed to be cross-curricular. They easily complimented and supplemented each other. The flow of all lessons seemed to be continuous and ongoing. Lesson samples are found in Appendix G.

One component of the self-esteem portion of the project was titled the "Me Bag." The objective of this lesson (#4) was to improve self concept and to allow students to introduce their own uniqueness to the class. The lesson was included because it could be used at all grade levels; it is simplistic in nature; and it encourages cooperation.

Teacher observation following this lesson showed that the results were positive. The children used listening skills and verbal communication skills to relate what they learned about another individual, and were more aware of each child's uniqueness. This allowed the children to feel important and valued. The students were active participants in this activity, developing a knowledge and respect for one another and providing an opportunity for students to better understand each other. Despite their limited cognitive ability,

the special education population appeared to profit from this lesson, as all were willing and eager to share the contents of their 'bag' which had been prepared at home with the aid of their parents. This was a very exiting time for these students.

To continue to encourage their investment in self awareness, another lesson titled "I'm a Special and Unique Person" was added to the week's agenda. The special education students were able to construct a mobile by making choices of their favorite colors, foods and friends to complete the project. Based on experience working with this special population, the teacher targeted the children's positive responses to hands-on activities to design this lesson. It enabled each child to work on a particular concept of self, while the teacher provided step by step directions. At the completion of the project, the children formed a learning circle, and each child was given an opportunity to showcase his or her art work and discuss the choices made. With some teacher prompting, the children were able to participate in this self-esteem exercise.

To bridge the objectives of self-esteem and conflict, a lesson (#9) titled "What Bugs Me" was introduced. The objective of this lesson was to enable students to give helpful feedback when others were annoying them. The importance of this lesson was to allow the children to express themselves in an appropriate manner and to address and respond to the annoying, i.e. the "bugging" behaviors observed in others. It gave them simple, easy to follow guidelines to achieve a desired outcome which was to change their response to an annoying behavior of another student.

The students used brainstorming techniques, role playing, cooperative and reflective skills as well as listening skills to accomplish the objective. In addition, the use of literature, The Grouchy Ladybug, Why Mosquitoes Buzz in

People's Ears, and "Bug Me" cards were lesson extensions used as a first step in introducing the necessary skills for positive conflict resolution.

Teacher observation showed that the children became more adept at recognizing objectionable behavior and dealt with the behavior rather than just with the person involved. Although the intent of the lesson was simple, it was determined to be too abstract for the special education students whose perceptions are extremely literal. Although most of the children enjoyed the accompanying literature selections, they were unable to make simple associations to their everyday lives. At this point, the special education teacher thought it would be beneficial to seek the assistance of the program's social worker who directed a role play activity to modify the original lesson plan.

In conjunction with the "Bug Me" lesson, a "Rules for Fighting Fair" poster was introduced. This lesson (#14) allowed the students to understand that all involved in a conflict have the problem, and they can work together to solve it. It is a case of them against the problem, not them against each other. The objective of this lesson was to help students identify bad habits and change them by fighting fairly. This was accomplished by discussing the need for rules, displaying the poster as a constant reminder, and by brainstorming ideas about good habits and bad habits. Some of the skills used in accomplishing this lesson included journal writing, role playing, cooperating and problem solving.

It was observed that some children used the "Rules for Fighting Fair" appropriately, applying their skills to situations outside the formal lesson time. During recess or playtime, some children were observed in the hallway using their rules to solve a problem peacefully without requiring teacher intervention.

It should be noted here that students in the targeted regular education classrooms were at varying developmental and cognitive levels, and

consequently not all responded to this lesson in the same appropriate manner. Therefore, it has been determined that the skills taught in this lesson will need continued reinforcement.

This lesson was individually modified for the special education population. Each student in that classroom already participates in a planned behavior modification program which has an ongoing system of self-monitoring techniques as an integral part of it. In effect, many students earn tokens to reward them for positive behavior. A pro-active program was established to reinforce classroom rules already in place. The special education population responded well to this behavioral management program.

The last component of the project included a lesson (#16) titled "What is Conflict Resolution?" The objectives of this lesson were to arrive at a single definition of conflict resolution, to understand and describe a conflict that had been experienced and to envision a solution to the conflict.

This lesson was implemented through the use of the children's book, The Land of Many Colors and through cooperative discussion groups. A discussion concerning "Win/Win" situations followed with personal examples being cited. The children responded in journals by writing about a personal conflict and its solution. A chart was constructed listing conflict words vs. conflict resolution words. This procedure enabled the students to understand the distinction between the two types of words. Conflict words express anger and judgment. They close doors to communication. Conflict resolution words often denote compromise and conciliation. They open doors for solutions.

Teacher observation following this lesson showed that the students need much additional practice recognizing conflict and knowing the appropriate measures to follow to resolve it. They need to be provided with many

opportunities for experiences in which to apply these skills.

This concept was too new to many of the children. They were unable to experience success without teacher mediation. Complete success in conflict resolution should be accomplished by teaching and reinforcing peacemaking skills throughout the day in all activities.

This lesson evolved around the use of multiple intelligences. It included an art activity directed at the visual/spatial intelligence, as well as activities involving body/kinesthetic intelligence which were addressed through role playing, and verbal/linguistic intelligence addressed through journal writing. Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences were addressed through the use of cooperative grouping and providing opportunities for self-awareness.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

The results of a student post implementation survey indicated that the students generally showed positive feelings about self. However, these responses did not show a notable variation from the pre-intervention results. Students continued to view themselves in a positive light in regards to issues of self-esteem and peer relations.

Their responses to knowing how to be a friend and to being loved remained constant. However, one "never" response to these questions was found to be disconcerting until it was learned it had come from a child whose parents had just announced their impending divorce. When this response was discovered the parent was contacted by phone, and together the teacher and parent initiated a referral to the school social worker.

A response of "always" to the question regarding getting along with classmates showed a dramatic contrast to the pre-intervention survey described

in Table 2 of Chapter 2. The students continued to indicate that they liked working in cooperative groups. No significant changes have been noted in the response to the questions concerning how the students settled differences or in their comparison of behavior at home verses behavior at school.

The teacher/researchers felt that many of the students involved in this project lacked an awareness of the welfare of others, and were unable to design an appropriate response to how their peers managed their behavior. It was determined that the first survey was not a valid measurement due to the fact that at the point in time in which it was conducted, students did not understand the meaning of conflict. In the post survey, students had a much better comprehension and recognition of conflict, and were better able to assess their responses and behavior. Although the language and content of the lessons taught were age appropriate, the concept of conflict resolution was found to be too advanced for many of the children. Therefore, they were unable to apply conflict resolution skills independently.

Table 3 on the following page provides a visual representation of the post-intervention survey results as compared to the results of the pre-intervention survey. The results are strikingly similar even though the post-intervention survey had six fewer respondees, due to lower class census at the end of the school year.

Table 3

Student Post-Intervention Survey Results March, 1994
as compared to
(Pre)-Intervention Results October, 1993

	Question	Always	Sometimes	Never
1.	Do you like yourself?	(34)30	(17)16	(2)1
2.	Do you have a friend?	(43)32	(9)15	(1)0
3.	Do you know how to be a friend?	(43)37	(10)8	(0)2
4.	Do you believe that you are loved?	(41)34	(11)11	(1)2
5.	Do you get along with your classmates?	(27)19	(23)27	(3)1
6.	Do you like working in co-operative groups?	(36)36	(16)11	(1)0
7.	Do you sometimes have to fight to settle differences?	(5)3	(14)15	(34)29
8.	Do you think you behave the same at school as home?	(22)24	(23)17	(8)6

N = (53) 47

Figure 4 which follows this narrative presents a summary of conflict incidents observed in the targeted classrooms following the interventions designed for this project. Analysis of the data presented there shows a decrease in the number of incidents during which students were unable to work cooperatively. This decrease was attributed to the fact that cooperative activities were used repeatedly throughout the school day as an integral part of

the curriculum.

A decrease was evident as well in the number of incidences of physical aggression toward others. This was attributed to the reinforcement of social skills through specific lessons. The implementation and practice of the conflict resolution skills such as those presented in the "Rules for Fighting Fair" lesson were a constant reinforcer of non-aggressive tactics.

There was a smaller difference in the area of verbal aggression, which may be the result of the maturity and developmental levels of the participating

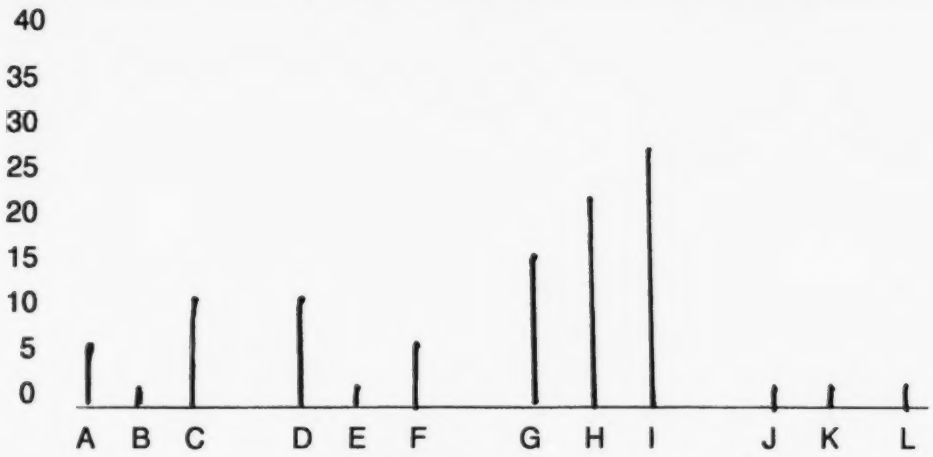

Figure 4

Summary of Conflict Incident Tallies in Targeted Classrooms for One Week Period Post-Interventions

Classroom 1 number of incidents:
A = verbal aggression
B = physical aggression
C = non-cooperation

Classroom 2 number of incidents:
D = verbal aggression
E = physical aggression
F = non-cooperation

Special Ed. class number of incidents:
G = verbal aggression
H = physical aggression
I = non-cooperation

Phys. Ed. class number of incidents:
J = verbal aggression
K = physical aggression
L = non-cooperation

students. It is not uncommon for students at this age level to respond verbally using inappropriate language since they possess fewer internal controls when an incident occurs.

Observations in the special education class indicated no noticeable differences in any of the areas as compared to the pre-intervention tally. This was attributed to the behavior modification plan in use in this classroom for each of its students. It should be noted here that incidents tallied for this survey involved six fewer students than the pre-intervention tally. These students had left the schools during the school year in which this project was implemented.

Reflections and Conclusions

It appears that students had some degree of difficulty in internalizing the concept of conflict resolution because they did not have an adequate understanding of its meaning. Although this project did meet with a measured degree of success, it was felt that the alloted time frame was insufficient to accomplish the original goals to the degree they were intended.

It should also be noted that developmental issues should also be considered. It is necessary to understand how these factors influence the way primary age children think about conflict and conflict revolution. Since young children tend to focus on self, it is difficult for them to think about a positive solution to a problem involving someone else at the same time.

In addition, children usually focus on the concrete and visible aspects of conflict rather than on internal, less obvious factors. They develop conflict resolution skills through a slow process of constructing meaning by using experiences and input from the environment, in much the same way as they learn to read.

Therefore, just as children need many opportunities to develop reading, writing and math skills, they also need many varied opportunities to develop positive conflict resolution skills. Teachers need to play an even greater role than ever before in helping childen develop these essential skills.

Chapter 6

DECISIONS ON THE FUTURE

The Solution Strategy

Conflict is a natural part of our lives. It is a behavior most often learned at a very early age. Conflicts arise over misunderstandings, unmet emotional needs, and differences in values and perceptions. When children's conflicts are not handled fairly, they feel angry, frustrated, resentful, afraid and powerless. These feelings are often expressed by lying, blaming, threatening, withdrawing or by being physically aggressive towards others. When conflict occurs, it can be used to teach children to think and act constructively and creatively. This includes teaching children how to diffuse conflict peacefully and gracefully.

Exposure to violence permeates our society. Crime and violence are the number one issues in the minds of Americans. How do we replace an adversarial attitude with a cooperative one? The children need to learn that working together can solve problems and this knowledge must come both from the home and from the school.

The educational setting must include lessons on conflict resolution, not as an isolated program, but integrated across the curriculum. Conflict resolution skills should be a part of every activity, from early morning to afternoon dismissal and should include adaptations for all grade levels and ability groups. Opportunities to encourage socialization for all children should

be implemented. All school staff members from administrators through auxiliary personnel should be involved in staff development opportunities directed at helping students cope with the conflicts they encounter.

Additional Applications

Our findings indicated that this conflict resolution plan should be continued and appropriate modifications designed as each situation dictates. It is our opinion that the scope and sequence of this project was too ambitious for the allotted time. Regardless of the students' cognitive abilities, it was found that many lessons were difficult to complete within the projected time frames because there was a such high degree of participation among the students and they tended to elaborate and stray from the intended topics. A significant amount of lesson time was spent in re-directing the children.

Some examples of student involvement included role playing, discussion, personal anecdotes and written responses. For lessons to be successful, teachers must maintain a sense of humor and exhibit patience and consistency when teaching the skills necessary to solve problems.

This project would work most effectively if it were implemented at the very beginning of the school year and then continued throughout the year as an on-going process.

Dissemination of Data and Recommendations

Given this information, we recommend the following:

1. Revise the plan to work in a cross-curricular setting.
2. Revise the project goals to be directed at conflict resolution awareness,as opposed to developing skills to solve conflicts

independently.

3. Offer in-service teacher training.
4. Include more educational resources such as games, songs, art activities.
5. Develop more teacher-directed mediation techniques.
6. Provide more suggestions for parental involvement.
7. Provide more cooperative learning suggestions for teachers.
8. Include a student evaluation component, thus allowing teachers to measure on-going student progress.
9. Establish criteria to measure progress using authentic assessment.
10. Initiate a peer mediation program involving upper-grade students.
11. Include a teacher evaluation component.
12. Provide opportunities for community involvement.
13. Encourage continuation of the program in middle and secondary schools.
14. Make conflict resolution a part of every school's mission statement.

Several resources (Appendix H) are available to introduce supplemental conflict resolution programs. These programs allow for integration into the curriculum, and may refer readers to other educators who are using these programs in their schools.

It is our opinion that this project was successful because most primary students were very receptive to the life skills curriculum and enjoyed taking part in the activities. They learned the skills necessary to manage one to one conflicts when the rules were kept simple. This project increased the students'

feeling of self worth, tolerance and awareness of other's feelings. It provided an opportunity for them to learn skills necessary to be cooperative in school, at home and ultimately in the adult workplace.

It is our hope that children will be able to develop external controls by applying skills they have internalized as a result of these interventions. If they learn the skills of conflict resolution, then they will become confident learners and responsible, caring human beings.

It is our belief that by creating an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect in the classroom, teachers can help children deal with their fears. Teachers need to provide students with opportunities to make connections to relate conflict resolution strategies taught to their immediate world--themselves, their friends, their families and then to the real world--world trends and issues, environmental issues, problems and events. Learning conflict resolution skills allows children to have some control over their own lives, and ultimately to make decisions in their lives that may affect the outcome of events in a wider arena. The issues of conflict resolution and peace then become crucial to mankind.

Finally, we must remember the need to be positive role models for our students. We must communicate honestly. We must be an effective advocates of children's rights, and most importantly, we must continue to seek ways to solve our own conflicts peacefully.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Teacher Letter

October, 1993

Dear Colleagues:

As you may know, I am presently working towards completion of my Master's degree, and as part of our program, I am required to complete an Action Research Project. My program partners and I have chosen the topic of improving students' conflict resolution skills.

And, we need your help. Would you please be kind enough to complete the attached survey and return it to my mailbox as soon as possible? It will be of great assistance to us in authenticating the need for continued interventions in this area.

Thank you very much in advance for your assistance.

Appendix B

TEACHER SURVEY

Please rate the following questions 1 through 5 by circling the appropriate number.

1	2	3	4	5
ALWAYS	**OFTEN**	**SOMETIMES**	**RARELY**	**NEVER**

Self-Esteem

Do you have students who do not have respect for, or a favorable impression of themselves?

1 2 3 4 5

Social Skills

Do you have any students who have difficulty working in groups?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you have students who are verbally abusive to others?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you have students who are physically aggressive towards others?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you have students who show little or no respect for:

other children	1	2	3	4	5
adults	1	2	3	4	5
property of others	1	2	3	4	5

Do you find that some students do not think before they act?

1 2 3 4 5

Parent Participation

Do you believe parents are supportive of your classroom management and rules?

1 2 3 4 5

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Appendix C

STUDENT SURVEY

	Always	Sometimes	Never

SELF ESTEEM

1. Do you like yourself?
2. Do you have a friend?
3. Do you know how to be a friend?
4. Do you believe that you are loved?

SOCIAL SKILLS

5. Do you get along with your classmates?
6. Do you like working in a co-operative group?
7. Do you sometimes have to fight (hit or yell) to settle your differences?
8. Do you think you behave in the same way at home as you do at school?

Appendix C

Student Survey

1. Do you like yourself? Always Sometimes Never

2. Do you have a friend? Always Sometimes Never

3. Do you know how to be a friend?
Always Sometimes Never

4. Do you believe you are loved?
Always Sometimes Never

5. Do you get along with the children in your class?
Always Sometimes Never

6. Do you like working in a cooperative group?
Always Sometimes Never

7. Do you sometimes have to fight (hit or yell) to settle your differences? Always Sometimes Never

8. Do you think you behave in the same way at home as you do at school? Always Sometimes Never

Appendix D

CONFLICT INCIDENT TALLY

DATE: _____

Inability to work cooperatively:

Physical aggression toward others:

Verbal aggression toward others:

Total number of classroom incidences requiring intervention: _____

This was used as an evaluation tool both pre- and post implementation.

Appendix E

Parent Letter

September, 1993

Dear Parents:

A little over a year ago, I entered a Master's degree program and have been working very diligently toward my goal of graduation in May, 1994. I hope that you will be as enthusiastic as I am that your children, my students, will be major contributors to the research project that is required for me to complete during this school year.

For the most part, the children will not even be aware that our daily activities are going to be an integral component of my project. My program partners, one of whom has written a letter (attached) to introduce herself, and I will be focusing on children's ability to resolve conflicts, and we have designed lessons which each of us will implement in daily lessons in our individual classrooms. Occasionally, your child may share some of our activities from the day, and we encourage you ask questions about what we did in school.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions you might have. I welcome your input, as your children and I work together toward a successful experience in C.C.D.D. II for all of us this school year at Mark Twain School.

Sincerely,

Rosely Kaiser

Appendix E

Parent Letter

September, 1993

Dear Parents:

As Mrs. Kaiser has explained to you in her letter, she is working towards completing her Master's degree. I feel very fortunate that I, too, am involved in the same program.
I presently work in the field of education as a school nurse for Arlington Heights Public School District 25 and became acquainted with Mrs. Kaiser as my classmate during the past school year.

When we discovered that our interests and experiences were similar, we became project partners, and as such will be working together with your children this year. During the past several years, I have worked the summer school program at Kensington School where many of your children attended before they became part of C.C.D.D.II.

I hope to have a chance to meet each of you, and am eager to work with your children during this year. I will be visiting their classroom as often as Mrs. Kaiser and I can arrange our schedules.

If you would like to contact me for any reason, I am most easily reached at South Middle School, 398-4249.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Voss, R.N.

Appendix E

Parent Letter

September, 1993

Dear Parents:

A little over a year ago, I entered a Master's degree program and have been working very diligently toward my goal of graduation in May, 1994. I hope that you will be as enthusiastic as I am that your children, my students, will be major contributors to the research project that is required for me to complete during this school year.

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Please feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions you might have. I welcome your input, as your children and I work together toward a successful experience in second grade this year.

Sincerely,

Ellen Swartz

Appendix E

Parent Letter

September, 1993

Dear Parents:

A little over a year ago, we entered a Master's degree program and have been working very diligently toward our goal of graduation in May, 1994. We hope that you will be as enthusiastic as we are that your children, our students, will be major contributors to the research project that is required for us to complete during this school year.

For the most part, the children will not even be aware that our daily activities are going to be an integral component of our project. Our program partners and we will be focusing on children's ability to resolve conflicts, and we have designed lessons which each of us will implement in daily lessons in our individual classrooms. Occasionally, your child may share some of our activities from the day, and we encourage you ask questions about what we did in school.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or suggestions you might have. I welcome your input, as we and your children work together toward a successful experience in second grade this year.

Sincerely,

Pamela Argyris
Classroom Teacher

Shay Storm
Physical Education Teacher

Appendix F

Children's Literature

Aardema, V. (1975). *Why mosquitoes buzz in people's ears.* New York: Dial Press.

Brandenburg, F. (1980). *It's not my fault.* New York: Greenwillow Books.

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Fitzhugh, L. & Scoppettone, S. (1969). *Bang bang you're dead.* New York: Harper and Row.

Geisel, T. (1984). *The butter battle book .* New York: Random House.

Haywood, C. (1955). *Eddie and his big deals.* New York: Morrow.

Klamath County Y.M.C.A. Family Preschool. (1993). *The land of many colors.* New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Kraus, R. (1971). *Leo the late bloomer.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

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Rathman, P. (1991). *Ruby the copycat.* New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Schlein, M. (1978). *I hate it.* Chicago: Albert Whitman & Co.

Zolotow, C. (1969). *The hating book.* New York: Harper and Row.

Appendix G

Lesson #4

Self Concept

"Me Bag"

Objective: To get acquainted with your classmates and introduce your uniqueness.

Materials: paper bags--lunch size
3-5 personal items

Procedure:
1. Distribute bags to students.
2. Students put 3 to 5 personl items in bag.
3. Students share bags with partners.
4. Partners share with another team of partners (four students now);
first partner tells new people about his partner's "Me Bag"

Extension Activities: Friendly interview
Poem "I'm Special, I'm Me"
Read Eddie and His Big Deals by Carolyn Haywood. Discuss.

Appendix G

Supplemental Lesson

Self Concept

"I'm a Special and Unique Person"

Objectives: The children will complete a discussion story and make a mobile about "me."
The children will experience an increased sense of self-esteem through sharing with their classmates.

Materials: five 5x7 pieces of construction paper per child for mobile hangers, yarn, scissors, hole punch
crayons, markers, glue sticks
chart paper
poem "I Am an Individual"

Procedure:
1. Using chart paper, list headings as follows:
   - Me
   - My best friend
   - My family
   - My favorite food
   - My favorite color
2. Have children sit on floor in a circle.
3. Read "I Am an Individual' Poem. Discuss.
4. Explain directions for mobile and that it focuses on each child's special attributes.
5. Have children construct mobile using one piece of construction paper per attribute. They can color or draw pictures to represent headings as listed above.
6. Bring children back to circle to share and display their work.
7. Record each child's choices on class chart.
   - Each child gets a chance to speak.
   - All others listen quietly and focus on the speaker.
   - No negatives or "put downs" allowed.

Extension Activities: More mobiles highlighting different personal attributes
Discussion in which each child describes a classmate's mobile
Songs and games directed at being "special"

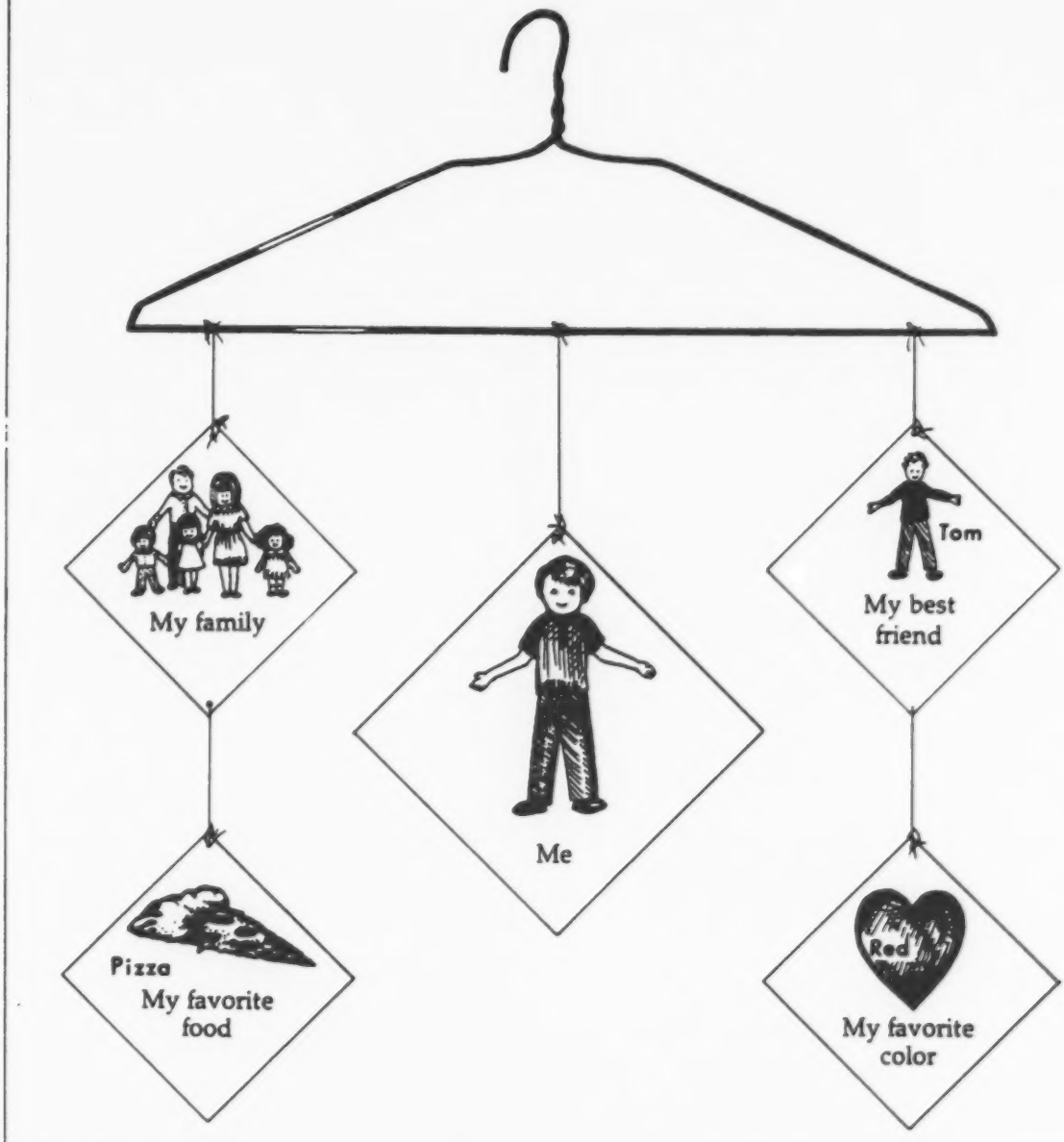
I AM AN INDIVIDUAL

by Naomi Drew

I am an individual.
I have dignity and worth.
I am unique.
I deserve respect and I respect others.
I am part of the human family.
I have something special to offer the world.
I am committed to a peaceful world for all of us.
I make a difference, and so do you.
I can accomplish whatever I set out to do, and so can you.
I am the key to peace.

Permission to Reprint for Classroom Use: © Naomi Drew, *Learning the Skills of Peacemaking.* Rolling Hills Estates, CA: Jalmar Press, 1987.

"ME" MOBILE


My family
Me
Tom
My best friend
Pizza
My favorite food
Red
My favorite color

Appendix G

Lesson #9

Celebrating Differences

"What Bugs Me"

Objective: To enable students to give helpful feedback when others are annoying them.

Materials: worksheets
poems

Procedure:
1. Discuss the idiom "Bugs."
2. Ask class to think about things that annoy them.
3. List these things on worksheet.
4. Brainstorm with a partner how to handle these behaviors (5-10 minutes).
5. List possible solutions on worksheet.
6. Share these.
7. Practice role play with your partner.
8. Distribute poem and read together.
9. Write reflection in journal.
   Was it easy or difficult to respond to annoying behavior? How do you think you will handle it now when someone 'bugs' you?

Extension Activities:
Make a bug. Inside the bug, list some ways to handle 'bugging.'
Read The Grouchy Ladybug by Eric Carle. Discuss.
Read Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears by V. Aardema Discuss.
Read an Amelia Bedelia book by Peggy Parrish. Make up your own idiom.
Use "Bug Me" cards for a practice session.

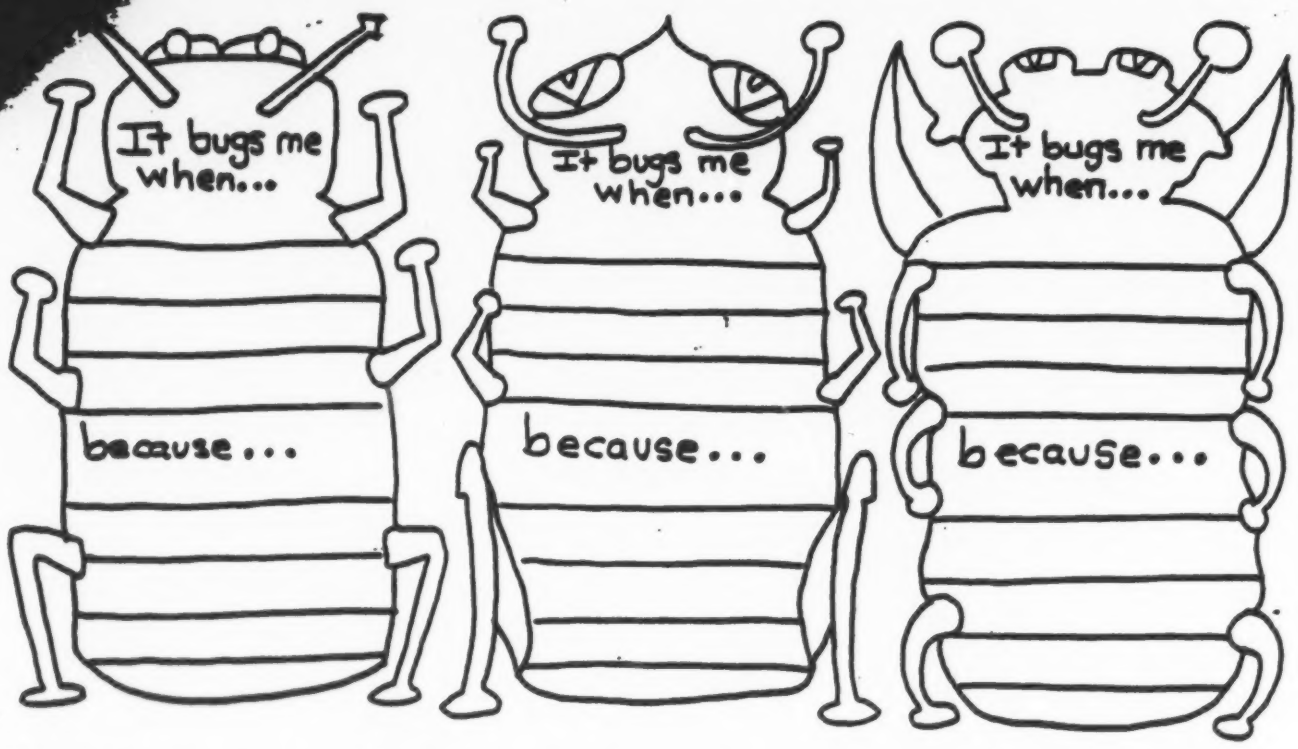
BUG CONTROL

Here's a poem to help you know
Exactly what to do,
When the actions of a classmate
Are realiy bugging you.

Don't raise your voice; don't jump or hit,
To shout will never do!
Instead keep cool and calmly state
What action bothers you.

Then tell the person right up front,
What you would have them do,
To change how he or she behaves
To stop what's bugging you.

THAT BUGS ME!



How many ways can you handle the above "bugging" situations? Remember, no fouls!

What are some of the things you do that BUG others? How can you change your behavior?

As a peacemaker I learned _____

Appendix G

Lesson #14

Social Skills

"Rules for Fighting Fair"

Objective: Students will understand that we can change bad habits by fighting fair.

Materials: "Fighting Fair" poster
newsprint
markers

Procedure:

1. Define: conflict
   foul/bad habits
2. Discuss rules.
   Why do we have them?
   Why are they important?
3. Display poster and discuss.
4. In small groups, have students brainstorm:
   good habits and bad habits.
5. Share.
6. Write a journal response.
   Identify a 'foul' you often use and tell why it is bad.
7. Get rid of your bad habits.
   Students write bad habits on pieces of paper.
   Papers are placed in a bag.
   Whole class walks to custodian's office to dispose of bag.

Extension Activities: Act out problem scenarios with groups.
Use "Rules for Fighting Fair" guidelines.
"What's the Problem?" worksheet

Rules for Fighting Fair

1. We find out the problem.
2. We attack the problem, not the person.
3. We listen to each other.
4. We care about each other's feelings.
5. We are responsible for what we say and do.

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Appendix G

Lesson #16

Conflict Resolution

"What Is Conflict Resolution?"

Objective: The students will understand one definition of conflict resolution. The students will understand and describe a conflict they have experienced and discuss a solution.

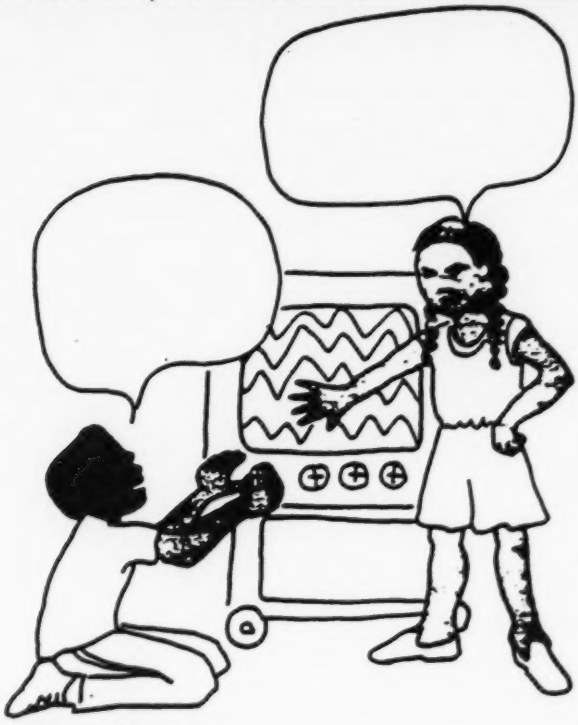
Materials: Chart paper with title "Conflict Words/Conflict ResolutionWords"
Book: The Land of Many Colors

Procedure:
1. Read The Land of Many Colors
2. Sit class in a circle. Ask and discuss, "What Is Conflict?"
3. Give definition of confict with examples.
4. Allow children to briefly share conflicts. Move around the circle so each child can participate. Keep it brief and not too personal.
5. Discuss/explain that there are ways to resolve conflicts positively by working things out. Explain that both persons must want to work out the problem for resolution.
6. Use chart to list words/phrases used in conflict, and then how those phrases can be used to resolve conlfict.
7. A discussion concerning "Win/Win" situations should follow, citing personal examples.

Extension Activities: Help the children understand the dfference and distinction between conflict words and conflict resolution words.
"What's the Problem?" worksheet

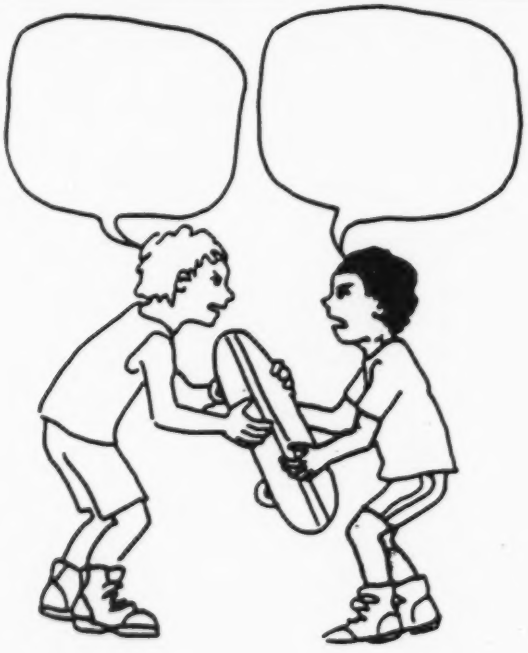
What's the Problem?

Look at the pictures below and fill in the balloons with what you think each person is saying.

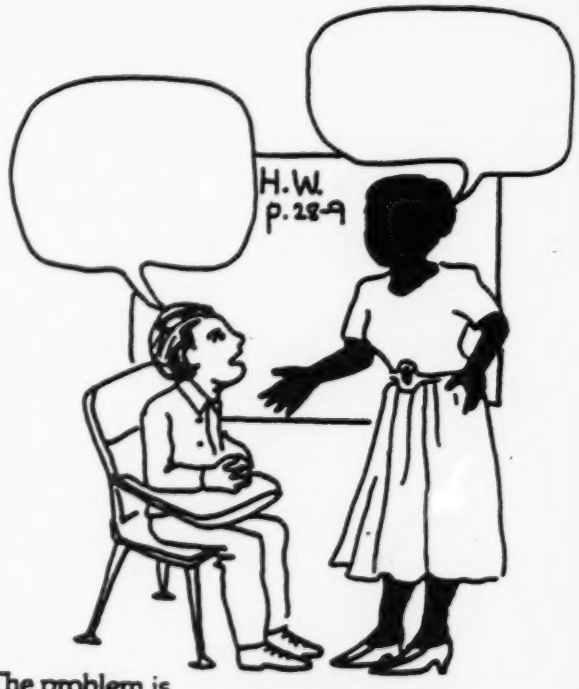


The problem is _____

The problem is _____



The problem is _____



The problem is _____

Appendix H

Resource List

Children's Creative Response to Conflict Program
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Box 271
Nyack, NY 10960
914/358-4601

Community Board Program
1540 Market St. Ste. 490
San Francisco, CA 94101
415/552-1250

Discipline with Dignity
National Educational Service
161 W. Third St.
Bloomington, IN 47402-0008
800/733-6786 or 812/336-7700

Educators for Social Responsibility
School Conflict Resolution Programs
23 Garden St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
617/492-1764

NAME (National Association for Mediation in Education)
425 Amith St.
Amherst, MA 01002
413/545-2462

National Center for Resolving Conflicts Creatively
163 Third Avenue # 103
New York, NY 10003
212/387-0225

Straight Talk About Risks (STAR)
Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
1225 Eye St. NW #1150
Washington, DC 20005
202/289-7319